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THE CHRISTIAN'S VICTORY:

A SERMON

DELIVERED IN THE CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL, ANNAN,

30TH APRIL, 1848.

Occasioned by the Death of JOHN EDGAR, who died at Landheads, 20th April, 1848,
Aged Twenty-five Years.

BY E. YOUNG.

"Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."
1 Cor. xv. 57.

HERE we read of a victory, and, what is wonderful, a victory over Death. Of all enemies, Death is usually the most hated and viewed with the greatest aversion. His very name has made the stoutest hearts to quail; to him the mightiest monarchs have been compelled to bow; at his approach, even the most renowned warriors have laid aside for ever their weapons of war. Against him, riches are no defence; and even the deepest poverty does not make him an object of desire. Men will rather endure trials the most severe, and hardships the most afflictive, than be relieved from these trials and hardships by the hand of Death. Whoever, therefore, can give us a victory over such an enemy, is doubtless a great benefactor, largely contributing to the happiness of men.

This victory is given by God,—*"Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory."* Here are two parties, God and sinners,—the Holy One and the guilty,—and the former giving a victory to the latter. Consider the *love* of God in giving us this victory. He was under no obligation to give it. When men became sinful, Death commenced his reign; and but for infinite love, he might have reigned for ever without interruption. Consider also the *power* of God in giving us this victory. No human arm could have given it. Neither the power of the prince, nor the skill of the physician, nor the affection of the friend—no one of these, nor all combined, can prevent the approach of death. Nor can they of themselves furnish us with an antidote to its terror. Fond relatives may try to persuade us that

there is no cause of alarm : they may labour to convince us that our virtues have been many, and our vices few : the dying man, if his mind is even partially enlightened, rejects the poor consolation, and is ready to say, " Miserable comforters are ye all." Infidelity, too, makes its appearance, and presents its claims to be heard. It tells us that " death is an eternal sleep," and therefore an object of desire rather than of dread. In the time of health we may persuade ourselves that infidelity is right, but the approach of death dispels the poor delusion, conscience resumes her place, and the immortal principle, struggling within, tells us that there is something there that will never be laid in the tomb. A victory over death is given us only by God.

In what way then is this victory given ? or by what means may the triumph be obtained ? The close of our text plainly informs us, " Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory *through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Two parties we have noticed already, and a third is here introduced. In the previous verse it is said, " The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." Men die because they are guilty, and it is because men are sinners that death is an object of terror. It is not the mere act of dying, or the mere separation of soul and body, of which men are chiefly afraid. With whatever pain *that* may be preceded or accompanied, it is the dread of something beyond it that is the chief source of alarm. The dying sinner knows that he is guilty : sins which appeared small or trifling, when death seemed at a distance, now assume an appearance of awful magnitude, and the sinner trembles to meet his offended God. Turning his eyes in upon himself, he sees no ground of hope ; and turning them outward upon the divine law, his terror is only increased. That law has no comfort for the guilty. Its very perfection gives it its power to alarm. It admits of no compromise, it lessens none of its demands, it can be satisfied only with perfect obedience. It is written in God's own Word and on the conscience of the dying sinner ; it is often " written as with a pen of iron and the point of a diamond." " By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight ; for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

Where then shall the sinner look ? To himself or to the divine law he looks in vain for comfort. To Jesus ! to Jesus alone let him direct his attention : there he will find what exactly meets his case, what removes his alarm, what relieves him of his burden, what gives purity to the heart and peace to the soul. The law is holy, an exact representation of the holiness of its Author ; but holy as it is, the Saviour in the

sinner's room has met all its demands. Justice is inflexible, and with a flaming sword it calls for vengeance upon the guilty ; but inflexible though justice be, its sword has been sheathed in the spotless Lamb of God, and it is drawn forth only to inscribe with its point the consolatory sentence, "There is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." In these, and in similar Scripture words, what a fund of consolation may the sinner obtain ! The same book which contains a record of divine justice is also a record of infinite love. In the same volume in which we read of our sins, we read of the "Lamb of God who beareth away the sin of the world." Now, mark my hearer, that this is a truth of universal interest, of unlimited application. It is not a truth for one and not for another ; it is a truth for all : its benefits are designed to be commensurate with the human race ; and it is only when this truth is known that the fear of death is removed, and the victory begins to be gained.

Along with the victory over the fear of death, there is also the assurance of a victory over the grave. Without the latter the former is incomplete, and nothing incomplete or imperfect is found in the workmanship of God. To be assured of immortality—to be assured, not only of an eternity of being, but of an eternity of happiness—this indeed is much, but this is not all. There is also the resurrection of the body—a doctrine which the Scriptures plainly declare—a doctrine originating in the Saviour's atonement, and confirmed and enforced by his own resurrection from the dead. Many are the forms of life and loveliness that have lived and loved on earth ; but on the morning of the resurrection, forms far more lovely will make their appearance, and these forms will come forth from where least of all they should have been expected ; these forms of surpassing beauty will then come forth from the tomb. From that narrow house, now so gloomy and cheerless, there will come forth, not paintings or portraits, but living realities—realities of life and beauty, more lovely than ever painter's pencil sketched, more to be admired than all that ever came from the artist's hand. Our vile body shall be changed ; its weakness, its diseases, its helplessness removed for ever, and fashioned like unto the glorious body of our exalted Lord. "It is sown in corruption ; it is raised in incorruption : it is sown in dishonour ; it is raised in glory : it is sown in weakness ; it is raised in power : it is sown a natural body ; it is raised a spiritual body." "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on

incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." In view of the eternal happiness of the soul, and in view more especially of the resurrection of the body, the Apostle breaks out in the triumphant exclamation, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

You are aware, brethren, that I have selected my subject to-day with special reference to our departed brother, whose death I am now to endeavour to improve. It is no part of my design to pronounce any eulogium upon him who is gone. By those favoured with his intimate friendship, such eulogium is not required; to his relatives who survive, it might be painful rather than agreeable; and as regards himself, he is now removed alike from human censure and human applause. Let the Holy Spirit alone pronounce his funeral oration, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."

But while it is not my intention to enlogise the dead, it is my intention to endeavour to benefit the living; and for this purpose I shall freely avail myself of the characteristic features of the former, in as far as these may contribute to the instruction of the latter.

I remark then in the *first* place, that our departed friend was a *Christian*. By this I do not mean that he had embraced certain views of truth, or had united himself to any particular section of the church of Christ. It is true that he did hold certain opinions of Scripture doctrines; and few persons have held their opinions more decidedly, or with a larger amount of intelligence; and it is also true that he steadily supported that form of church order which he believed to be nearest to the mind of Christ. It is not, however, to this that I at present refer. I speak of him as a Christian, because he had undergone a change of heart, the change described in Scripture as a new birth, a new creation, a passing from death unto life. It is this change that constitutes conversion; without it no man is a Christian on earth; and without it none are admitted into heaven.

It was about five years ago that this change was experienced by our departed friend. Even from his childhood he had been regular and conscientious in his attention to duties. His parents appear to have laboured faithfully, according to

the light they possessed, to train their family in the fear of the Lord ; and hence, even before his heart was renewed, our brother appeared to be a Christian in the eyes of the world. Even then he was attentive to secret prayer ; the Word of God was not only read but carefully studied ; for some considerable time, he and several youthful friends met on Lord's day mornings for prayer and praise and religious conversation ; in all that he did he was earnest and sincere ; his diligence in secret was always equal, and even superior to his appearance in public ; and yet, after all, he was not at that time a disciple of Christ. Of this he himself became deeply sensible, and his different feelings when he became a Christian in reality, left him no room to doubt that he had not been a Christian before.

We have said that his religion did not consist in holding certain views or opinions. It was not a mere matter of theory or sentiment, but something existing in the heart, and exerting an influence upon the life. Yet when we come to inquire by what means the change of heart was produced, our attention is turned at once to those views of truth which revelation unfolds. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." These and similar passages contain the Gospel in its lovely simplicity ; in them the Gospel is developed without restriction ; in them there is the only Gospel which meets the case of the sinner ; and this Gospel the Holy Spirit employed to change the heart of our departed friend. Believing it, he was able to say, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." That heavenly peace of mind ; that holy tranquillity of soul which all his attention to duties had never secured, was obtained at once by faith in the Saviour's cross. In himself he saw nothing but sin ; in his most careful performance of duties, he saw nothing to meet the demands of God's perfect law, but in Jesus he saw all that was required ; and the whole secret of his change of heart and peace of mind—a peace which remained unbroken till his dying hour ; the whole secret of this change and of this peace, will be found in this one fact—he looked upon himself as only a sinner, and on Jesus Christ as "all and in all."

I remark, *secondly*, that our brother was an *intelligent Christian*. He read much, and reflected more ; and his intelligence was the result of reading and reflection. In this respect, especially, I would hold him up for your constant

and careful imitation. A want of general intelligence among the people of God is deeply injurious to themselves, and greatly prevents their usefulness in promoting the cause of their Lord. It is right that the Bible should be chiefly studied; it is there, and only there, that we are to obtain that knowledge which maketh "wise unto salvation;" but that man must be far behind indeed who will gravely tell us in the middle of the nineteenth century that the Bible alone should receive our attention. In many other books much valuable information is found, and it is the part of wisdom to receive instruction from whatever quarter it may be obtained. But while reading is necessary, reflection or *thinking* is even more needful. It was his habit of always thinking for himself that constituted, in the case of our brother, that independence of mind for which he was remarkable; and it was this that enabled him to possess that clearness of view for which he was also distinguished. But for his diffidence in using the talents he possessed, he might have been still more useful in the church below: it was at one time in his heart to fill a higher place and to occupy a more extensive sphere; and though his desire was not accomplished on earth, it may be granted in some congenial form in the mansions above.

Again, I remark that he was *an active Christian*. In illustration of this, I refer to his laborious attention to his class in the Sabbath School, his exertions in the cause of temperance, his unremitting attention to the affairs of the church, and his general and widely-diffused efforts for the salvation of souls. In estimating the amount of any man's activity, we must always remember the sphere in which he is placed. The man who lives upon his fortune, and to whom labour is only a recreation, makes but small sacrifice in devoting a few hours every week, or even every day, to deeds of benevolence or charity; and yet, whenever such a man appears, he is usually looked upon as a sort of prodigy, and held up to the admiration of this wondering world. Nor are we disposed to deprive such a man of the admiration he may elicit. Rather would we hold him up still more prominently, that those moving in the same circle with himself may be led to imitate as well as admire. What we deprecate is not the bestowment of honour upon him, but the withholding it from others who are decidedly more worthy. Those Christian brethren who are engaged in business ten or twelve hours on every one of six days of the week, and those Christian sisters whose attention is occupied fourteen or fifteen hours daily with domestic affairs—when such Christians become Sabbath

School teachers, distribute religious tracts, speak to their fellow-sinners of the way of salvation, and are constant and regular in their attendance upon the weekly meetings for prayer—such Christians are ten times more worthy of commendation than many of those wealthy disciples whose deeds of benevolence astonish the world and fill the historic page. It was to this bumbler, but more meritorious class, that our departed brother belonged. Let it be ours to imitate his worthy example: then, while we share in his labours of love, we shall also share in his rich and eternal reward.

In the *fourth* place, I remark that he was a *public-spirited Christian*. It was no part of his religion to affirm that he took no interest in politics, or that he never looked into a newspaper. His mind was occupied with whatever could affect the glory of God or the welfare of man; and hence the affairs of his country, and of the world, received always a share of his regard. In what way, I would here ask—in what way shall we pray with intelligence for our country's prosperity, if we are altogether unacquainted with its affairs? Or how shall we give thanks to God for favourable symptoms in any part of the world, if we cherish the opinion that its political and social aspect is no part of our concern? No such opinion was cherished by our departed friend. His mind was far too generous and expansive to take any such limited view, or to harbour even for a moment any such ridiculous idea.

Here we must notice more especially his attachment to the temperance reform. In this his interest was deep and abiding. It received his attention previous to the date of his conversion, and after his conversion occurred, his attachment to the cause of temperance was not lessened, but increased. With him there was no pitiful trifling about leaving the Gospel to reform the drunkard. His very faith in the Gospel, and in the Gospel's power, led him the more earnestly to employ such means as the spirit of the Gospel requires. He knew, what indeed is well known, that only total abstinence could reclaim those who are already intemperate; and he was not so foolish as to suppose that drunkards will begin to abstain entirely, while those around them are setting the example of drinking in moderation. He also knew that moderate drinkers are the very class among whom drunkards are trained; and hence he felt, as every Christian should feel, that it was at once a duty and a privilege totally to abstain.

I remark again, that he was a *spiritually-minded Chris-*

tian, and a Christian firmly established in the faith of the Gospel. He "continued in the faith grounded and settled, and was not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which he had heard." During the period of extreme weakness which preceded his dissolution, his mind sometimes wandered, and he was evidently unconscious of the words which he uttered. And yet these words were always about the Saviour, or about his hopes for eternity : even when he suffered most severely, it was easy to see on what his mind was reposing, and where his affections were placed. I confess, brethren, that of all I have heard of our brother's feelings during his illness, this has produced on my own mind the deepest impression. I cannot but ask myself, and I cannot but propose the question to you, Are your minds now so stored with divine truth, and are your hearts now so set on heavenly things, that even were you nearly insensible your lips would utter only what is in harmony with your Christian profession? For myself, I must confess my conviction that, tried by this test, I should be found greatly deficient. It has led me to resolve to meditate still more closely upon the saving truth of the Gospel ; and if you are at all afraid of a similar deficiency, I trust you will also adopt the same resolution. It is one thing to feel that we have enough to support us while the mind is unruffled by the billows of adversity or the waves of affliction ; it is quite another thing to have the soul sustained in the season of sickness and in the hour of death. In his last illness our brother was not only calm but cheerful, and on the minds of the few who had an opportunity of seeing him, his cheerfulness produced a deep impression. It was very easy to see, that the man who could be so cheerful with death immediately before him, was widely different from the mere professor.

Yes ! my hearer, he was widely different indeed ; and the difference was caused by the knowledge of a truth which the mere professor has never known. It was not caused by a view of his blameless life, or by the recollection of his usefulness and activity since he became a follower of Christ. Of these we have said something, and much more we might have said, but let it be distinctly understood that, in his dying hour, these were not the ground of his hopes or the source of his comfort. It has been frequently said that the recollection of a well-spent life will support the soul in the hour of death. Far be it from me to affirm that such recollection is not better than its opposite ; yet I must affirm, that if there is nothing

more, the poor dying sinner will be wretched indeed. It was no such recollection that supported the mind of our brother. On the Gospel alone his spirit reposed; and on that Gospel, not as given forth in any human composition, but as it comes pure and undiluted from God's own Word. "I am a great sinner, but Christ is a great Saviour." This was the language of his heart, and he knew that it was "the mind of the Spirit."

During a considerable part of his illness he had much pleasure in perusing the writings of Baxter. That precious volume, "The Saint's Rest," was his frequent or constant companion; but as his illness increased, even Baxter was laid aside, and his soul was nourished and sustained by "the sincere milk of the word." On one occasion, when he was near the end of his course, his brother having read to him a verse of Scripture, was proceeding to make a remark suggested by the passage. The invalid, however, immediately stopped him, saying, "That is enough; *it is God's word, I need nothing more.*" O, my dear hearer, let your mind now become deeply familiar with Scripture. Beware of the common practice of taking your views at second hand, or from the opinions of men. Study the Bible for yourself, and ascertain there what the Gospel actually is. Then, and not till then, your "faith will stand not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

It only remains to remark, once more, that our departed friend is *now a glorified Christian*. On the morning of the 20th of April, after a night of extreme suffering, the spirit obtained its release, and was taken to dwell with its God. Just as the night had passed away, and the sun appeared in the east, the liberated soul of our brother began to ascend to that city of which we are told that "there is no night there;" and of whose inhabitants it is affirmed, that "they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever." What a contrast between the gloom of the night and the splendour of the opening day! between the sufferings which are past and the glory which has now been revealed! between the sorrowful feelings of the friends below and the joy of the emancipated spirit in the world above! As he enters the gate of the city, his arrival is welcomed by millions who have gone before. Is there any reason to doubt that among these will be some whom he knew and loved on earth? or is there any reason to question that they will be the first to direct his attention to the Lamb in the midst of the throne? But we cannot, and we will not attempt

to follow out the description. Of the employment of the saints in heaven we know as yet but little, and it will serve no good purpose to supply by conjecture our lack of information. Of our brother, and of his holy companions, we can only say,—

“ Thus much, and this is all we know,
 They are completely blest,
 And freed from sin, and care, and woe,
 They with their Saviour rest.”

There are especially two or three classes to whom this subject is full of warning, and fraught with important instruction.

We apply it, first, to *the young*. Our brother was only in the vigour of youth: we, in our ignorance, may regard his death as premature or untimely; but he was meet for heaven, and,—

“ That life is long which answers life's great end.”

On the young in general, and on the members of his class in particular, I would earnestly urge the importance, the absolute necessity, of being ready to die. Seldom during his illness did our brother feel more deeply than at one of the times when his class paid him a visit, and he was unable to see them. “ I cannot,” he said, “ I cannot speak to them; I can only speak to God on their behalf.” It may be that his very inability to see them increased the fervency of his prayers; and I trust it produced on their minds a salutary impression. Children of the Sabbath School! see that ye receive and improve the instructions of your teachers now; soon will your teachers be unable to address you; and if you remain unsaved, you and they will be parted for ever.

Our present subject conveys a loud warning to those who are *putting off the time of their conversion*. During the latter part of our brother's illness, such was his extreme weakness, that even two or three sentences were too much for him to hear, and seldom could any one be allowed even to engage in prayer. This was owing entirely to the nature of his disease; but remember, my dear hearer, that when you are laid on a death-bed, *your* disease, your pain, and weakness may be similar to *his*. If, then, you have not learned the Gospel before, is it probable that you will learn it then? We have great faith in the Gospel—we have unlimited confidence in the goodness of God—we know that up till the latest moment salvation is free, but we also know that of all places the bed of death is the most unsuit-

able on which to prepare to die. *Make preparation NOW*; and as you value your own soul, be satisfied with nothing less than assurance of safety. With anything less than this, you have no reason to regard yourself as a Christian; and nothing less than assurance will sustain your spirit in the hour of death.

Full and complete was the assurance which our brother enjoyed. At one time being asked whether his confidence continued, he quickly and calmly replied, "Firm as a rock." It was in the near view of death that these words were uttered, proving the power of that precious Gospel which even then can sustain the soul. Our brother had often read these words of the prophet, and now standing on the edge of time and looking into eternity, he felt their significance and value, "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation, he that believeth shall not make haste." Looking back to the Cross and forward to Heaven—to the former as the ground of his confidence, to the latter as his eternal abode—he said, even when his sufferings were most severe, "One half-hour in glory will more than make up for all this!" Yes! my brother, your words were true; and now, in your happy experience, you feel their truth. "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

We hope it will not be supposed that his assurance was obtained only in the time of his affliction. It was far from him, and be it far from us, to give any countenance to the soul-ruining delusion—a delusion as ridiculous as it is ruinous—that men may be Christians and yet live till near the end of their days without the assurance of safety. The assurance which he had on his death-bed was the same assurance which he obtained at the time of his conversion. As he had no holiness from which to draw his assurance at first, so it was not from his own holiness that he drew his assurance at last. Of the value and necessity of holiness as a *qualification* for heaven, he was deeply sensible; solemnly and frequently did he ponder the words, "Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:" but instead of drawing his confidence from a view of his own holiness, he drew both the one and the other from the atonement of Christ. The old venerable divines, now in the realms above, never spoke more truly than when they said, as they frequently did, that the ground of our confidence is not the work of the Spirit within us, but the work of the

Saviour without us, that work as it is plainly revealed in "the word of the truth of the Gospel." O, my fellow-sinner, I beseech you to yield now to the striving of the Spirit, and fix your eye upon the Cross. Get a knowledge of yourself as a sinner, and of the sacrifice of Christ as full satisfaction for human guilt. Cast aside all human limitations, and view the sacrifice of Jesus as at once perfect and universal—receive as a little child what God freely gives—believe as a reasonable creature what your Creator plainly declares—and no longer will you have any difficulty about the assurance of safety. Instead of going mourning all your days, you will then "rejoice in the Lord," and your duties, instead of being a toil and a burden, will be all performed under the constraining motive of a Saviour's love. In love to God, accompanied by love to man, is found the very germ, the principle, the essence of holiness; and this love will dwell in your heart only when all your doubts are driven away regarding his love to you. "We love him because he first loved us."

To his fellow-teachers in the Sabbath School, to his fellow-Christians in general, and to the members of this church in particular, our brother's early removal conveys both instruction and encouragement. Supported by that grace, of which we also are assured, he has finished his course and completed his labours;—his warfare is ended, his victory is won. Now he sings in triumph, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Now he *feels*, what he formerly knew, that his faith, and patience, and sufferings have not been in vain; and were he permitted again to address us, it would be in some such language as this, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

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